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Broader Mandate From Hill?

In Quest of Elbow Room on Africa

The Carter administration, frustrated by congressional restraints on its foreign policy prerogatives, is considering asking for general guidelines to replace specific prohibitions on what it can and can't do overseas.

President Carter's current concern centers on Africa, where a means has been sought to counter Cuban and Soviet activity. There is particular concern with Angola, where a legislative restriction sponsored by Sen. Dick Clark, D-Iowa, prohibits military aid which would likely go to rebels fighting that nation's leftist regime.

The approach being considered would involve an attempt to persuade Congress to get out of the business of what one administration official calls "micro management" of foreign policy with specific country-by-country prohibitions on military or economic aid. In its place, the administration could ask Congress to set forth its desires in general policy guidelines. Such a proposal could grow out of the survey of congressional restrictions requested by Carter from the State Department.

This strategy envisions avoiding casting the issue as an executive-versus-Congress power struggle in the conduct of foreign policy. Congress has for a number of years asserted itself in foreign policy, chiefly as an outgrowth of the Vietnam war.

THE ADMINISTRATION'S opportunity to avoid a confrontation atmosphere may already have been lost, however.

Clark has already been approached, as the White House acknowledged, by CIA chief Stansfield Turner and David Aaron, deputy to national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski about restrictions of the Clark amendment.

Clark has responded by reaffirming his intention to block covert military aid in Angola by suggesting publicly that such aid is what Carter has in mind.

He added that "I think it would be a great mistake to get us involved. . . . We don't need a war we can't win."

At the White House, Press Secretary Jody Powell said Carter has made no decision on such aid.

POWELL, EMPHASIZING his view that no decision has been made to aid the guerrilla forces, said in an interview: "Just because you go up and say, 'Let's talk about possibilities' . . . that doesn't mean you will take any kind of specific action," the Associated Press reported.

According to AP, Clark said he is confident the administration is abiding by the prohibition against involvement in Angola.

He also praised the administration's response to date in Zaire, calling it "a very wise and very carefully thought through policy to this point."

Powell said the administration has made no secret of its opposition to Soviet and Cuban actions in Africa,

and said "we are exploring ways to counter it."

POWELL SAID Carter had been unaware of the specifics of the meetings among Turner, Aaron and Clark. "He didn't even know they were up there," Powell said.

Powell said Carter, in a meeting with a group of lawmakers at the White House on Tuesday, expressed a general concern that restrictions placed on his actions by Congress had robbed him of flexibility in dealing with other nations.

"He was concerned about having that flexibility, and having other countries know you have that flexibility," Powell said.

Carter first complained about congressional restrictions on his actions overseas during a breakfast meeting with congressional leaders May 16. He ordered a State Department review of these restrictions, including the Clark amendment.

But aside from a general complaint about "tight restrictions" on presidential action, Carter hasn't said publicly what he objects to in the congressional limits which Congress placed on presidential actions at the close of the Vietnam war.

POWELL HAS acknowledged these constraints did not prevent Carter from shipping military equipment to Zaire to combat a rebel invasion.

And the restraints didn't prevent him from sending 18 U.S. Air Force transports to help Belgian and French forces rescue whites in Zaire who were faced with a massacre.

Thus Powell supports United Nations Ambassador Andrew Young, who said Sunday that the president's hands weren't tied in aiding Zaire. Young added on Monday that some press reports had misinterpreted his remarks as being opposed to Carter's.